

VZCZCXRO5335
RR RUEHAG RUEHDA RUEHDF RUEHFL RUEHIK RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHLN RUEHLZ
RUEHROV RUEHSR RUEHVK RUEHYG
DE RUEHVB #0236 0531544
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 221544Z FEB 06
FM AMEMBASSY ZAGREB
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 5736
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE
RUEHPH/CDC ATLANTA GA
RUEAUSA/DEPT OF HHS WASHDC
RUERAF/DIR AFMIC FORT DETRICK MD
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUCPDO/USDOC WASHDC
RUEHRC/USDA WASHDC

UNCLAS ZAGREB 000236

SIPDIS

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DEPT PLEASE PASS TO DS/DSS, DS/IP, M/MED/JCTRIPLETT
FAS/CMP/DLP WETZEL AND MAGGINNIS
FAS/ITP/EAMED POMEROY AND FLEMING
CA/OCS/ACS DAVID SCHENSTED
USAID FOR E&E/ECA/B/ANNE CONVERY

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [TBIO](#) [SENV](#) [ECON](#) [EAGR](#) [PREL](#) [CASC](#) [HR](#)

SUBJECT: CROATIA: AVIAN INFLUENZA UPDATE: FEBRUARY
22

REF: ZAGREB 0222 AND PREVIOUS

11. (U) SUMMARY: On February 21, the Poultry Center lab at the Croatian Veterinary Institute confirmed that a dead swan found on the island of Ciovo tested positive for H5N1. The lab continues to operate without a real-time polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR) machine but a replacement machine is expected in March. The discovery of the infected swan has not activated any of Embassy Zagreb's tripwires.
END SUMMARY

H5N1 NOT UNEXPECTED, BUT LOCATION IS UNUSUAL

12. (U) Ciovo is located near the Split airport on the Dalmatian coast and is not a common area for migratory swans. Ministry of Agriculture officials speculated that the bird died in flight, fell into the sea and washed up in Ciovo. The amount of poultry in the Ciovo area is negligible and the GOC has started implementing biosafety measures.

LESS THAN OPTIMAL CONDITIONS IN LAB

13. (U) Emboffs visited the Poultry Center lab and met with the director, Dr. Vladimir Savic, on February 22. Since the removal of the RT-PCR machine, Savic said they are isolating the virus in chicken embryos, testing for H5 or H7 antisera and then using a conventional PCR machine to test for the N1 gene. The final step, DNA sequencing of the virus, is done at the Ruder Boskovic Institute. Savic said that, other than the initial sample in October, samples are not sent to the EC reference lab for confirmation.

14. (U) Savic conceded that although the Poultry Center operates a bio-safety level (BSL) 1 laboratory, the lab employs testing methods (of isolating the virus in chicken embryos) that should be done in a higher BSL lab. Using a RT-PCR instead of chicken embryos would negate the need for a higher BSL lab, however, as a self-funded entity,

the Poultry Center cannot afford to buy the machine. The Center is currently waiting for payment by the GOC for the tests it has already completed (over 4000 since September 2005). A Ministry of Agriculture representative told Savic that the GOC would purchase a RT-PCR machine within the next few months and that payment for the Center's services would be forthcoming. In the mean time, Savic has arranged for a free trial-period lease of a RT-PCR machine from a company called Applied Bio Systems. The Applied Bio Systems machine should be installed sometime in March.

15. (U) The latest discovery of a swan infected with H5N1 has not activated any of Embassy Zagreb's tripwires. The consular section has posted the latest Avian Flu Fact Sheet on the announcements section of the Embassy's webpage. Consular staff will also provide avian flu informational materials and answer questions at four upcoming town hall receptions for American citizens, hosted by the Ambassador, in major Croatian cities.

FRANK